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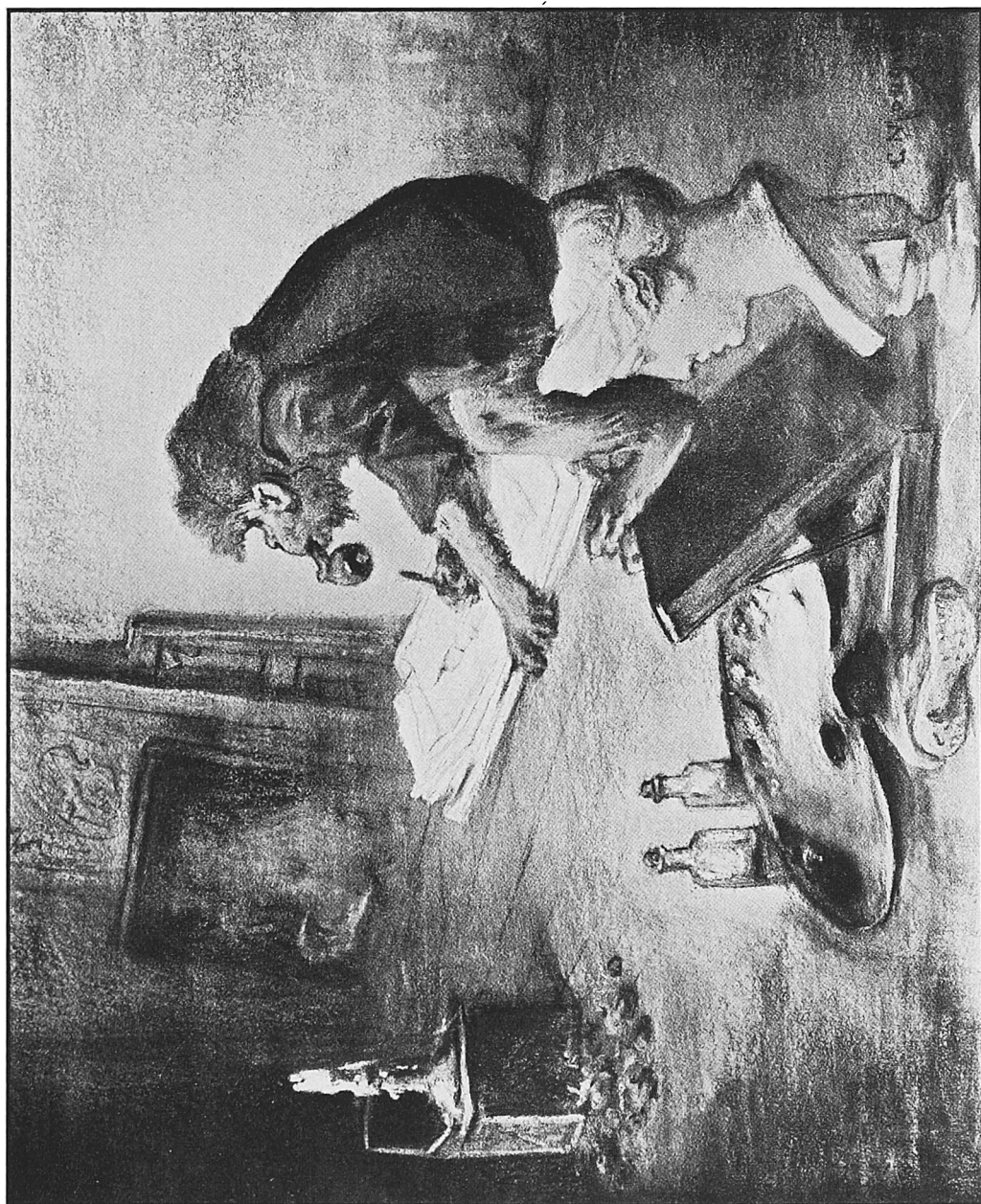
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From *L'Art Français*

**"THE MODERNIST"**

*Down with the Ideal and up with the Real!*

BY C. MOXSON

# EDITORIALS

## CHARLATANISM IN ART

### BUNCO ARTISTS, BUNCO CRITICS AND BUNCO ART DEALERS

WHAT is a charlatan, in general? In the Grand Dictionnaire Universel of Larousse is this definition: "A person who sells drugs in public squares and a person who ordinarily retails his merchandise with a great flourish of emphatic words." "A person who in one way or another exploits the credulity of the public and claims to have a knowledge of some mysterious secret."

Charlatanism in art consists in an artist resorting to any sort of fantastic, hypocritical tricks to gain notoriety in the press generally, and a false standing in art, by surrounding himself and his art with pretentious mystery, in order to enable him to create a belief in his being a superman and mysteriously endowed with "genius" in order to more easily deceive the public into buying his wares—this in face of the fact that there is nothing at all mysterious about art!

Why is there charlatanism in art? Because our social organization has not yet progressed to the degree of perfection, which, while conserving the interests of the whole, will guarantee the growth of the individual by giving him the leisure to think.

The majority being forced to dig in the earth for enough food, shelter and clothes, they have not enough energy left over, after the day's struggle, to overcome their spiritual fatigue and depressing boredom; from which they seek relief by going to thoughtless or frivolous relaxation, or worse. They are too tired to think. Hence they do not think. And if there is any progress at all in civilization it is due to the exceptional few who are born with enough strength to stand the strain of the daily grind—and then have enough energy left over to enable them to think.

This low thinking-power of the majority deprives the majority of enough intelligence to save them from becoming the victims of the social pirates who regard their fellows as legitimate prey either for gross robbery or foxy exploitation. It is this condition that develops charlatans in science, religion, philosophy, politics as well as in art.

We do not hope by exposing charlatanism in art to prevent it. Ah no! Our immortal Barnum said: "There's a sucker born every minute, and he actually enjoys being humbugged!" Barnum's success proved the truth of this fling. But there is always a minority of these poor victims who resent being humbugged and really seek knowledge and freedom from the exploitation of the charlatan. It is to help this minority that we write this *exposé*.

The public should never forget that when a fakir writes "Doctor" over his door, this does not

make him a physician. And when a preposterous Bohemian of the Paris Latin quarter writes *artiste* over his door, it does not make him a second Raphael or Michelangelo. Another thing that must not be forgotten is this: France, in order to retain the supremacy in "industrial" art which she manifested at the London Exposition of 1851, transformed herself into a veritable hothouse for the creation of *original* artists. Every hamlet school-teacher was put on the lookout for every budding talent promising originality! the government being indifferent to the direction this originality might take, whether towards the ugly or beautiful, the refined or vulgar. The watchword was:—*du NOUVEAU*. At all hazards something new must be produced, in order to maintain Paris as the art center of the world and to sustain the reputation of France as the world's arbiter of good taste. That is why the government Art Department expanded rapidly until the Under-Secretary of State for Fine Arts became an important member of the French cabinet and art became largely a governmental affair. It was good business and good statesmanship—it meant millions to French commerce. The rest of the European nations followed suit, above all Germany.

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By easy stages this crushing need of the ever new made every European nation indifferent, then actually blind, to the Beautiful. This went on until the "modernistic" art party was born, whose leaders soon grew numerous and strong enough to formulate their first great slogan and openly preach it to the French Government in about these words: "The pursuit of the beautiful is an antique fad; the artist should not seek beauty but the expression of character in a personal technique."

This theory containing the four fundamental fallacies of modernistic art suited the French politicians and business men admirably, because it enormously increased the chances for the creation of *novel* things, as soon as it should become no longer needful for an artist to create things that *must* be not only original but at the same time beautiful. Could this theory be "put over" on the public of the world; viz.: that not beauty but originality—even if ugly—is the *sine qua non* of art, then French commercial success, plus artistic supremacy, and then the triumph of France would be assured because of the superior inventiveness of the French people. So the Government encouraged the "modernistic" art party in its enraged pursuit of originality and modernity by purchas-

ing some of the least rank examples—even discreetly exhibiting them—and setting aside for the more sane ones the Salle Caillebotte in the Luxembourg Museum, etc.

Therefore, when we examine the evolution of French art from 1860 to 1910 we see a very gradual departure by one stream from such art as the common-sense Frenchmen considered beautiful, or at least was French in its elegance and refinement. Then we see another stream going to the clumsy and ugly. Originality ever dominating in the new, beauty and sanity were slowly despised by the modernists—who passed by degrees to the strange, weird and shocking, to the insane and the corrupt, finally landing in the abyss of the absolutely degenerate. Already in 1863 this became so marked that the Jury in the Salon of that year threw out a number of works that were too corrupt even for the tolerant French.

But the perverted modernists were too strongly backed by the politicians who were also indifferent to the beautiful and the chaste—so long as originality was manifested. So these rejected artists raised a row; the result was the “Salon of the Rejected.” Out of this later on grew the “Salon of the Independents” with no jury, no prizes, with “come one, come all and exhibit”—as a foundation.

All normal comprehensible standards of excellence having thus been thrown to the winds by the organizers of the independent Salons—who as good as said: “All incompetent down-and-outers, cynical dilettantes, even social sores are welcome here!”—the achieving of “fame” was made “as easy as eating cake” as one man said. So shoals of silly ego-maniacs—hungry for notoriety in the world of art—rushed into these Salons, mostly as a joke, their number of misfits being soon swelled by the falling-in of joking Bohemians and hoboes—even criminals, male and female—who, because they heard of a Millet or a Corot selling for \$50,000, saw in the world of art at least an easier life than is furnished by the municipal soup-house or the wood-pile or State’s prison. Let us assume that every one of these misfit artists was sincere; these Independent Salons were nevertheless the places where the bunco-artists were born. How they were developed and became full-fledged charlatans, despisers of the public and cunning exploiters of their fellowmen, we soon shall show.

Meanwhile the truly modern artists who were dubbed “academic” and were not at all a “party” kept right on producing beautiful things, some strikingly original and others moderately so. But having, for political reasons, only the lukewarm toleration of the government instead of its enthusiastic support, as they had before, and being fiercely attacked by the modernistic rabble—hungry for its place in the sun—they were gradually forced into the shadow, though not ceasing to produce beautiful things.

In this race for mere novelty Germany soon entered the field against France. As the French mind is less metaphysical than the German, less romantic, less weird, the Germans gradually went ahead of France in bizarre originality—first by buying things produced in France but rejected even by Frenchmen and then by producing things weirder than even the French mind could tolerate,

until Germany fell into the same æsthetic abyss where the French had fallen.

The ghastly thing about these exhibitions has been the moral obliquity and indecency, the striking ineptitude and vulgarity—tolerated by the government because of the extreme worship by Frenchmen of individual liberty. But of course the French people did not buy the creations exposed at these “art fairs”—it was the bunco-dealers who bought—to palm them off on foreigners! And the efforts of their agents, here in America, to make our public believe that these exhibitions in Paris have been a popular financial success—in the sense that the best French people invested in them—is a libel on France.

Now, so long as the truly modern artists were sustained by the government in making beautiful things, even if not weirdly “original,” before the craze for novelty swept over France, the newspaper art critics did not have much chance, because the press demanded serious and brilliant critiques from able writers. Hence, there were comparatively few art-critics and writers. But as soon as, for political and commercial reasons, the government began to give support to the modernistic art party, the newspaper critics increased both in number and in corruption.

Americans must not forget that Diderot had already criticised art in the Paris of his day, but the growth in Europe of national rivalry for dominance in industrial art-novelties dragged in more and more the entire press of Europe until every newspaper had its art critic. In order to insure his paper an ever-increasing authority and sale—and also confirm his own value to his paper—he had to resort to all kinds of attention-attracting devices—at first honest, then dishonest. Nothing succeeded like a successful “sensation.” He did not have to know æsthetics profoundly, for every one in Paris knows how to babble superficially and pleasantly about art—now and then even expertly. But as to having a deep-founded theory of art and its social meaning, he was as ignorant as other people.

Thus, gradually, the newspaper penny-a-liner grew into a “critic” and also a charlatan. Why? Because as we have said according to Barnum, the majority of the crowd “loves to be humbugged,” and because they do not know anything about *principles* of art, because generally they are too tired even to think, so they are easily gulled; also because gulling the crowd always pays his newspaper handsomely and pays himself; also it is easier than being brilliant—along honest and serious lines. The tendency of hard-worked men in life and on the press is always to follow the line of least resistance. Hence the bunco-critic!

When these exhibitions at the “Salon of the Independents” in Paris—which at first were not taken seriously even by their organizers or the press or the government—which allowed these exhibitions more as a safety valve for the turbulent failures at the regular salons—when these exhibitions became so large as to fill a canvas barracks, stringing along the Seine for half a mile—which people visited as they would a farce in a vaudeville show to laugh and giggle—it dawned upon the politicians and business men, all past-masters in economy, to utilize, in their campaign for origi-

nalinity at all hazards, the energy wasted at these exhibitions. The serious politicians who during the first years of the exhibition had laughed with the crowd, when you asked them now: "Well, what do you think of the Independents show this year?" no longer laughed but said: *Eh bien, il-y-a quelque chose!* "Well—there is something there!" and said thus, though the bad quality of the art had fallen far below that of the first years and had become a standing joke among the serious artists! Soon certain exhibitors who had shown a *peculiar* kind of artistic degeneracy and consistently followed their special "lines" were singled out by certain newspaper critics as men having a "temperament"—Zola's slogan then being popular: "Art is nature seen through a temperament." So temperament was the test. They sought out these men and boosted them with fulsome eulogy, at first "free for nothing" but later for pay. As long as they paid they were boosted and they rarely ceased to pay afterwards, knowing full well the consequences.

Finally it dawned upon the commercial art-dealer that, by combining with the bunco-critic and the bunco-artists he and they all together could play the game of buncoing the public—that public which is too tired to think—and, so, rake in the shekels. This bunco-trinity worked the game in various ways. But here is the way one leading art dealer played the cards:—

With the aid of a newspaper critic he picked out certain of the "artists" who painted consistently in one way—that stereotyped way representing "temperament" in the eyes of the cunningly deluded. This artist was "staked" with enough money to wash his face, get decent shoes, a top-hat and to fatten his bones, not too much, O no! just enough to keep him alive and in slavery. Then the "critic" boosted him in his newspaper. The editor did not know the game at first. The dealer, moving about among the *nouveaux riches* in Paris, both native and foreign, would with infinite sinuosity fasten onto a certain new plutocrat, ambitious to shine as a patron of art and, of course, "modern" art! Must be up to date, *hein?* *Mais oui, monsieur!* Nothing old fashioned!

He visits him at his next reception, praises only his worst pictures and flagellates perhaps a Bougereau, a Baudry or perhaps even a Raphael—as academic poison. He invites Plutocrat to his shop, for whom when he comes he brings out, O so carefully, a silk bag containing a finely framed daub. Then, striking a fakir's attitude—"Voilà! monsieur! the very latest style! And see what the critics of the *News* says about the artist. *Hein?* no slouch, eh? Hah! I told you he is a great discoverer. Look at the *chiaro-oscuro* of this picture! Look at the scientific parallelogrammic juxtaposition of the lines and the psychological resonance of harmonies of the color, and then observe all the deep-souled temperament of the tremendously original personality of the great artist that radiates from even the very texture of each brush stroke! Talk about the mysteries of Velasquez, huh! He was not in the running! Why, the value of the works of this man is bound to go 'way beyond the price of that cabbage-huckster Corot and that old wooden shoe of a Millet!

"To prove all this, let me tell you: you are an

intelligent man, a pragmatist, money talks, *n'est pas?* Now, if you will give me 6,000 francs for this picture I will guarantee you will sell it for double that sum in six months; if not, I will give you back your money. *Hein?* that is liberal, isn't it?"

Plutocrat smiles, bites his cigar and like a good poker player pays his 6,000 francs and takes a chance on being humbugged.

At the next reception the bunco-critic, now a confederate sent there by the dealer, in loud terms praises to the skies the new picture with more of the mysterious jargon that no one can understand. Next time another confederate calls and offers him 5,000 francs for the picture. He comes back in a week and offers him 8,000—10,000 and finally 12,000—double the sum he paid for it! as the bunco-dealer had said. Plutocrat sells and wins. The following week he itches for more of the game and runs down and buys four more canvases signed by the same "artist." But these four—he keeps. No confederate ever comes round to ravish from him this prey!

But by and by the plutocrat, who no doubt, according to Barnum "enjoyed being humbugged" for a while, finds himself the object of ridicule. This stings him. His vanity forces him in order to save his face to join the modernistic art party and help boost along the trash of the bunco gang and to defend himself against his critics—like the fox who lost his tail in a trap and then ridiculed the tails of the other foxes who had laughed at him for losing his own. Thus the modernists get another recruit even though a "lame-duck" one.

Thus the game is played by one man.

Another favorite game is to have an auction sale in some reputable auction house by a *combine* of bunco-dealers. At the sale the pictures are nearly all bid in by the dealers themselves at very high prices. Why? To have a public record in some newspaper or an art magazine, but above all in a printed catalogue of the sale, in order at some future sale to prove the prices obtained at the previous sale. These are called "wash art sales" for it is the same trick played under that name in Wall Street.

Thus these sales are nothing but lying swindles gotten up by Gentiles as well as Jews to prove that, like the works of Millet, Corot, Harpignies, Gérôme, Houdon, Dubois, etc., which increased in a few years enormously in price, these modernistic creations would also jump in price—this to allure the picture gamblers, especially the foreigners, Frenchmen being too shrewd and far-seeing to be caught in the game.

For a thousand years the Frenchman has made it his business to captivate mankind, and he has succeeded. He has captivated the spiritual and the poetic, also the material and the stodgy. Hence the most noble and the most ignoble is found in Paris—Notre Dame and the Tour de Nesle, Sacré Cœur—sublime church upon the Montmartre Hill and supported by Frenchmen, and at the foot—the "Moulin Rouge," the scarlet bazar of eroticism—supported by foreigners and laughed at by the Frenchmen, the Salon of the Champs-Élysées where

shine the immortal works of art, made by great men, for the delectation and lifting of mankind, and the barracks of the "Independants" close by, where sprawl the ignoble art warts spawned by ego-maniacal imbeciles and perverts for the swindling and degradation of the mentally weak and the morally tainted—and tolerated by the French Government only because of the extreme worship by Frenchmen of individual liberty. "You can not resist temptation? So much the worse for you—on the scrap pile with you!" That is the attitude of most Frenchmen.

Moreover, during the thousand years that the Frenchman has been leading the world, in heroism and also in caddism; in sublime self-sacrifice and in low self-coddling, all his creations—of the Christian soul as well as of the Mephistophelic brain—have been for "exportation"—to conquer the world. So the most exalting and the most degrading come to us from Paris.

It remains only for the American art gambler to investigate before placing his bet on the wrong horse, and for the serious American public to look sharp and deal only with such art dealers, critics and artists as are above deceiving them and whom no money can buy.

Now, the cultured public can easily see that when this swindle game is carried on long enough and all over Europe, how by degrees a psychological condition is created, an atmosphere, in which only those who know human nature and the constitution of the mind and soul of man and therefore know what will endure the test of time, will be able to retain their sanity and will not wobble and fall into the net of these swindlers in the world of art.

What makes the matter worse is that certain moneyed carps, bored to death and stewing in their stifling wealth, really do enjoy the sensation of being swindled, moderately, by a clever art dealer, just as they enjoy any other shock that will lift them, if even for a day, out of their fat ennui, like the Arab silk merchant in the Cairo bazar who will call you an idiotic donkey because you pay him—without a moment's haggling—five prices for a shawl as soon as he asks it. He feels a grudge against you for having robbed him of the enjoyment he gets out of a game of haggling with you over the price, that being the only real intellectual enjoyment he has in life.

To show that this picture is not overdrawn we quote from an interview with Sir Charles Purdon Clarke, late Director of the Metropolitan Art Museum, published in the *New York Times* of January 17th, 1909:

How have we advanced in Art, asks the struggling painter today of his successful confrère in artistic crime who makes posters? The artist is in the *hands of the dealer*, and the *art critic*—who is the dealer's publicity agent.

REPORTER: "The Art Critics are not trustworthy?"

MR. CLARKE: "Well, I don't want to be like some men and make charges I can not wholly prove, but the relation that some art critics of today bear to the art of today is distinctly anomalous. It is not any worse here than it is in France, however, or perhaps elsewhere in the art centers of the world.

"There are modern art critics who are in partnership with the art dealers to make the best of the picture market. I don't mean to say that the art critic in this country is always conscious of the dealers's business methods. The art critic is inspired chiefly with a sense of

obligation to satisfy his editor, to give the impression that he is more astute and newsy than his rival. To do this he goes to the dealer for information and of course the dealer, seeing his advantage, takes it.

"In France the state of art criticism is shocking. It is impossible to get anything in the art world in France without paying for it."

This statement from beyond the tomb holds good today, with perhaps even more force than eight years ago.

We could quote a score of such verdicts from the greatest artists of Europe, victims of the greed of the commercial critics. Gérôme called them "vipers" because they would not hesitate to destroy the reputation of any artist who refused to pay them blackmail, and who would and do eulogize to the skies, in the most mystifying palaver, the vilest exhibitions of degenerate art. The most dangerous of these bunco-men are the charlatan critics. For they alone have their say in the press and can mold the opinion of the unthinking public. These bunco-critics have not only been busy boosting degenerate modernistic art, but, in order to succeed all the better, they have been not only belittling the works of the great modern artists, but actually blackmailing them.

From 1870 to 1900 there was active a very notorious art critic writing for the most powerful art journals of Paris. He was clever, but he was a blackmailer, pure and simple. His name is so well known to the artists of the world of that epoch that we need not name him. When any promising new arrival among the artists refused to give him a work of art, after he had eulogized his works in the articles he wrote on the Salon exhibition for his journals, that artist seldom failed to suffer for his shortsightedness or his unwillingness to enrich the critic—if he failed to give him one of his canvases. Nearly every one of the important French artists during his epoch did thus pay blackmail. These canvases were converted in due time into cash by the critic.

Fancy a writer like Elie Faure, the author of a very good book on Velasquez, writing a fulsome eulogy in a catalogue for an exhibition of the works of an artist, some of which the police of Amsterdam suppressed on account of their indecency! But, not only are many of these European newspaper critics naturally dishonest, some are forced into dishonesty by a complication of conditions at once comic and tragic. For example:

In its issue of July 1st, 1910 the *Gil Blas* of Paris published one of a series of six articles on "The Parasites of Art" in one of which the sculptor Rodin was included among the artistic parasites and called a "manufacturer" of sculpture, a "swindler," etc. Shortly after this something violent must have happened in the business office of the *Gil Blas*. For on September 23rd, 1910 appeared an article with flaring headlines announcing that there would be an exhibition in the very reception rooms in the offices of the *Gil Blas* of a lot of drawings by Rodin. In this article the same writer who made the attack on Rodin on July 1st lauded him most abjectly, both articles being signed by the same name. Whether this critic gave his honest opinion of Rodin in the first article or in the second—he certainly "ate crow." This exhibition was inaugurated in the afternoon of



October 17, 1910. At this forced exhibition was present M. Dujardin-Beaumetz, the Under-Secretary of State for Fine Arts for the French Government! Does not this true story show a shameful side of politics and newspaper art criticism in Paris, the art center of the world? And will the American public after this still believe in the value of any French newspaper art criticism?

PARIS is the most prolific producer of charlatans. In fact it is the Mecca of all "bunco-men" because the Parisian is the modern Athenian with a mercurial temperament, with an active hatred of boredom and love of novelty. Hence his infinite curiosity—the secret of his strength and of his weakness—and the reason why he so often falls a victim to the charlatan. After having made Paris the fountain head of *Nouveautés de Paris* he has made it at once the most beautiful and creative city in the world, and at the same time the fattest of stamping-grounds for all the mountebanks of the ages—in religion and philosophy as well as in finance and art.

Voltaire already spoke of this:

C'est à Paris, dans nôtre immense ville,  
En grands esprits, en sots toujours fertile,  
Mes chers amis, qu'il faut bien nous garder  
Des charlatans qui viennent l'inonder.

It is at Paris, in our immense city—  
Of great minds and fools always fertile—  
My dear friends, that we must beware  
Of the charlatans who have flooded it.

And a generation ago Eugène Scribe the dramatist said: "Charlatanism? Why, every one practices it in Paris; it is approved, it is accepted, it is current coin!" until, acting on the theory that we "first endure, then pity, then embrace," that ego-maniacal chaser of mere "novelty" and father of "modernism" Baudelaire, praised charlatanism as a justifiable and necessary equipment of the artist! The result is that all his spiritual disciples amongst the modernist-artists and the critics who live off them—adopted the methods of Cagliostro as far as possible, in deceiving the public to buy their wares by praising their own and decrying those of their fellow artists. And not content with charlatanism they also adopted a personal and mountebank "flag" by which even a mad bull should know them at sight: Baudelaire had his "green hair"; Gautier has his "red waistcoat"; Whistler had his "white plume"; Oscar Wilde had his "Christlike locks," etc., all assiduously cultivated for effect until a saving sense of humor forces us to shout aloud with a twinkle in our eye: "Father in Heaven, defend us against losing our capacity for laughing, re-laughing and counter-laughing!"

You might ask what enables France to carry such a weight of charlatanism. It is the inexhaustible fund of common-sense of the Frenchman. You can fool him easily, but not for long; and when he understands—beware!

Moreover, just now he is himself playing the game of fooling you, who buy modernistic art. The result? Most of the degenerate works of art made

in France are sold in Germany, in Russia, Sweden, Norway and even in England—many of those people being given over to excessive metaphysical speculation and therefore loving mysticism, and hence not only easily buncoed but like the Germans remaining so for a long time. When disillusioned, sad to say, they are easily led to suicide.

The French people buy almost none of this degenerate art; the dealer unloads it on the gaping fools of the world outside France. *C'est pour l'exportation à l'étranger!* Hence the most erudite metaphysical and incomprehensible eulogies of this degenerate art come from Germany, Russia and Sweden, some of them written for and published by the dealers who have stocked up on such stuff on speculation, which transcendental piffle our own bunco-critics are beginning to absorb and spread over the press and books.

In view of these facts what should the American public do—lose faith in art and artists and quit the world of art in disgust? No indeed! It might as well lose faith in man and quit life itself. What the public should do is simply, in the language of the street, to "get wise" to the fact that the first thing is—to follow its own instincts and intuitions as to what is beautiful. Above all the normal cultured public—that great public that is anxious for the perfection of the race and knows that all human activity has value only in so far as it helps along the evolution of the race from animalism to civilization. That public will never go astray—if it be true to its instincts and intuitions as to what is relatively true, exaltingly beautiful and therefore socially good.

Absolute truth in matters of art is impossible. But relative truth is possible and often attained by great artists. Let the public avoid like the pest every sort of art that departs violently from relative truth, either in drawing, in color or in the expression of emotion on the face of a marble or a painted figure. If on the stage an actor's acting does not ring true, that is proof that he is a bad actor. If a painted tree is labeled an oak tree and then does not recall at least the character of an oak, it is bad art. If the proportions of a carved or painted human figure are false to your instincts, the work is overstyled and so "deformed in form" and therefore is bad art; and so of poetry; if it does not ring true and cause emotion in the soul, it is poor poetry, or if music is devoid of the ecstasy of melody it is bad music, no matter what the charlatan composers may say.

Do not allow yourself, reader, to be upset by the cryptic, incomprehensible jargon of some hydrocephalic bunco-critic when he asks "What do you mean by truth?" He knows perfectly well that you mean not scientific truth but relative truth. Tap your forehead, point to your brain, smile at him pityingly—as though to say: "You are neurotic!" and walk away. And if you have a good memory, before going, quote to him, with a measured calm, the following lines of Pope:

First follow Nature and your judgment frame  
By her just standard, which is still the same:  
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,  
One clear, unchanged and universal light,  
Life, Force and Beauty must to all impart  
At once the source, and end, and test of Art.